

Close cousins: Just 400,000 years ago, modern humans and Neanderthal lineages split, 100,000 years more recently than previous estimates

More evidence is showing that *Homo sapiens* and Neanderthals are more closely related than once thought. A new estimate suggests that our species may have diverged from Neanderthals just 408,000 years ago, which is “substantially later” than previous estimates.

[Neanderthals](#) are an extinct species of hominin who lived in Eurasia until about 40,000 years ago. Fossil remains reveal some [noticeable physical differences](#) between *Homo sapiens* and Neanderthals, such as a shorter and broader frame, a wider pelvis, and heavier bones.

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Other recent evidence from both fossils and DNA [suggests](#) that Neanderthal and modern human lineages separated between 500,000 years ago to 650,000 years ago. Previous [estimates](#) indicated that the divergence could have occurred over 800,000 years ago.

Whenever the split occurred, the presence of Neanderthals didn’t stray far from us. Genetically, we’re 99.7 percent identical and it is [starkly clear](#) that rampant interbreeding occurred between the species time and time again.

Genes from Neanderthals are especially prevalent in people of European descent who [inherit about 2 percent](#) of their genomes from Neanderthal ancestors. These genes still influence human populations today, such as [the size of folks’ noses](#) to their [vulnerability to viral infections](#).

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